# Two hours of sitting harms your arteries... unless you drink this first

11/03/2025 // Cassie B. // **1K** Views

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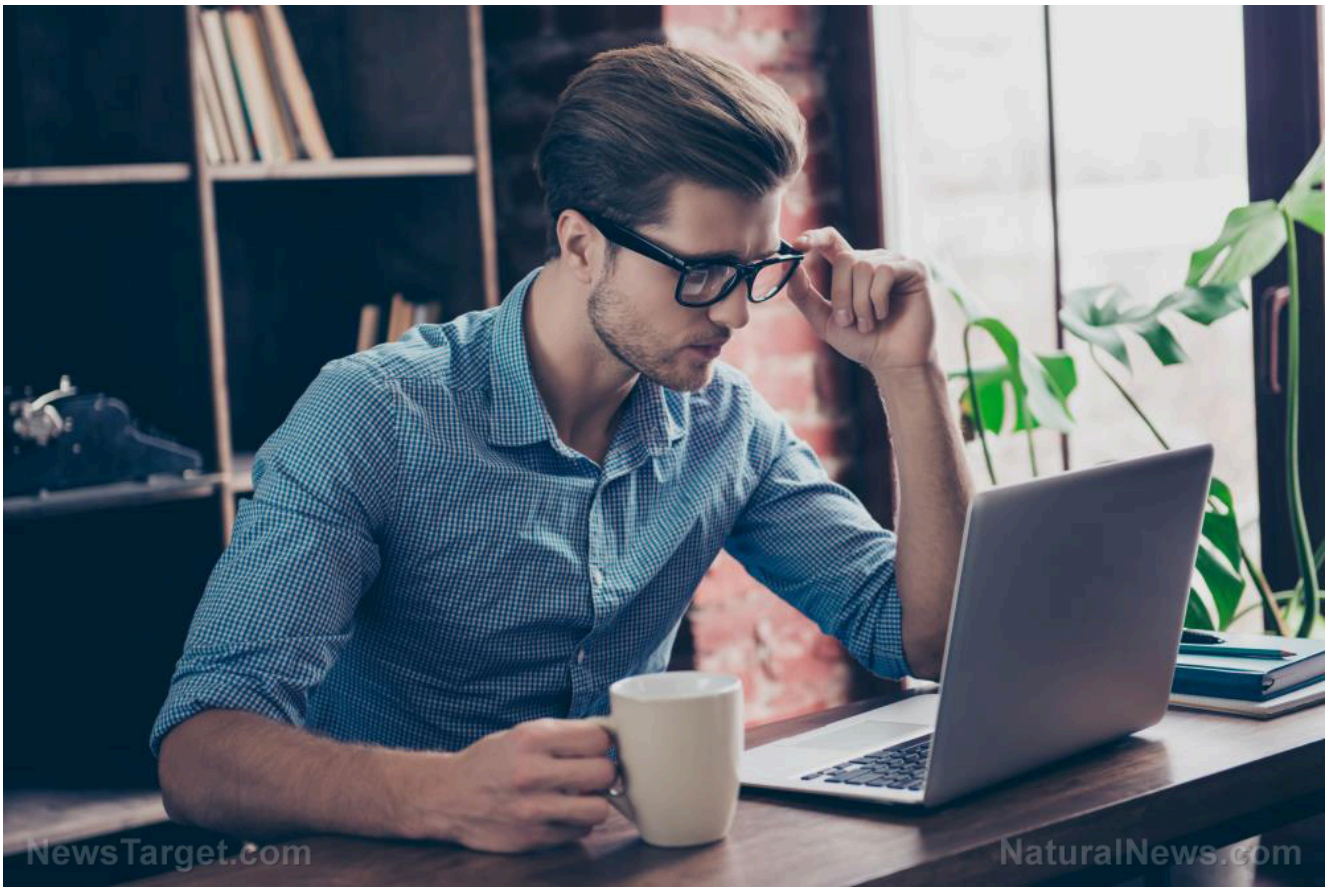


- Even excellent cardiovascular fitness does not protect against the vascular harm from prolonged sitting.
- Just two hours of uninterrupted sitting significantly impairs blood vessel function in healthy individuals.
- Consuming cocoa rich in flavanols before sitting completely prevented this damage to vascular function.
- Flavanols work by boosting nitric oxide, which relaxes blood vessels and improves circulation.
- This protective effect was universal, working equally well for both highly fit and less-fit people.

You might think your regular workout protects you from the damage of a long day at your desk, but startling new research reveals that even excellent cardiovascular fitness offers no shield against the immediate harm that sitting inflicts on your blood vessels. A groundbreaking study from the *University of Birmingham*, published in *The Journal of Physiology*, discovered that just two hours of uninterrupted sitting significantly impairs vascular function in young, healthy men. The exciting finding, however, is that a simple,

natural solution completely prevented this damage: consuming cocoa rich in flavanols before sitting down.

This research delivers a powerful blow to the common assumption that being fit can counteract the effects of a sedentary lifestyle. The study involved 40 young men, half of whom were highly fit and half with average fitness levels. Each participant underwent two sessions where they sat motionless for two hours after drinking a cocoa beverage. The results were unequivocal. Whether highly fit or not, every man who drank a low-flavanol cocoa drink experienced a significant reduction in the flexibility of arteries in both their arms and legs.

The damage from sitting is not trivial. A decline in this measure of blood vessel function, known as flow-mediated dilation, is a known predictor of future cardiovascular risk. The study found that sitting caused a decrease of up to 1.1% in arterial function. Previous research suggests that just a 1% reduction can increase the risk of heart disease and stroke by as much as 13%.

## The simple plant solution

The remarkable part of the experiment was the complete protection offered by flavanols. The men who consumed a high-flavanol cocoa drink before sitting maintained perfect vascular function throughout the entire two-hour period. Their blood vessels showed no decline. This natural intervention worked equally well for both the highly fit and the less-fit participants, proving its universal application.

Flavanols are potent plant-based compounds found abundantly in cocoa, green tea, black tea, berries, and apples. The science behind their benefit is well-established. These compounds work by boosting the body's production of nitric oxide, a crucial molecule that relaxes blood vessels, improves circulation, and keeps arteries flexible. This study is the first to demonstrate that they can directly combat the vascular stress caused by prolonged stillness.

Dr. Catarina Rendeiro, the study's lead author, highlighted the pervasiveness of the problem. "Whether we are sitting at desks, behind the wheel of a car, on a train, or on the sofa reading a book or watching TV, we all spend a lot of time seated," she said. "Even though we are not moving our bodies, we are still putting them under stress." Finding accessible ways to mitigate this damage is therefore critical for public health.

## Why your fitness level does not matter

One of the most counterintuitive findings was the total lack of protection offered by having high fitness levels. The highly fit participants entered the study with the expected advantages of lower resting heart rates and blood pressure. Yet after two hours of sitting, their blood vessels were just as impaired as those of their less-active peers. This clearly shows that the

mechanisms of sitting-induced damage operate independently of general cardiovascular fitness.

The study did identify one area where flavanols could not help: blood pressure. Sitting increased diastolic blood pressure by as much as 5.8 mmHg in all participants, regardless of which drink they consumed. This indicates that while flavanols are powerfully protective for vascular function, they are not a magic bullet for all cardiovascular metrics affected by sedentary behavior.

This research provides a practical and empowering strategy for anyone whose life involves long periods of sitting, from office workers to long-distance travelers. The protective effects of flavanols were achieved with a dose readily available from high-quality cocoa products or several servings of flavanol-rich foods like green tea and berries. Combining this dietary approach with the well-known advice to take frequent walking breaks creates a robust defense against the hidden dangers of inactivity. It is a compelling reminder that nature often provides the simplest and most effective solutions for the health challenges created by modern life.

**Sources for this article include:**

NaturalHealth365.com

StudyFinds.org

MedicalXpress.com

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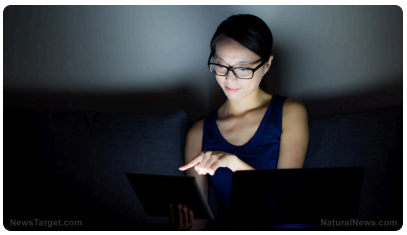

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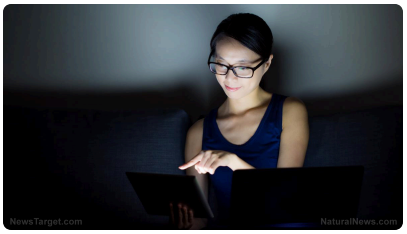

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